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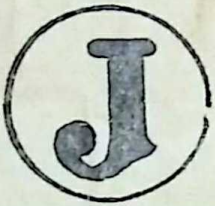


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# LOKAMANYA TILAK

*A giant among men has fallen. The voice of the lion is hushed. Lokamanya is no more. It is difficult to believe of him as dead. He was so much part of the people.....For us he will go down to the generations yet unborn as a Maker of Modern India. They will revere his memory as of a man who lived for them and died for them. It is blasphemy to talk of such a man as dead. The permanent essence of him abides with us for ever.* —MAHATMA GANDHI

" 1818 to 1918, a hundred years." Those were the last words of Lokamanya Tilak; and they give the clue to the understanding of his whole life.

In 1818, the Mahrattas lost their independence and on the death bed, his thoughts were centred on the failure to win it back after a hundred years. But he lived long enough to see the glimpses of the coming dawn. Two years earlier, Britain had solemnly promised that India was to have responsible Government and the steps taken in pursuance of that declaration had so far satisfied Mr. Tilak as to evoke from him the famous promise of responsive co-operation. And to that achievement, no one had made a greater contribution than he ; nor had any Indian made such great sacrifices. To-day, the policy of inviting suffering for one's political principles is so widely accepted that one is likely to under-rate the Lokamanya's part ; but when he started public life, political mendicancy was the limit ; one convicted of sedition was looked upon more or less as a political leper. It was in such an atmosphere that Tilak took upon himself the risky responsibility of proclaiming the great mantram : " Swaraj is my birthright and I must have it."

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, that is the name by which he was known to the outside public. Tilak was his family title ; Gangadhar was his father. Bal was his personal name, the abbreviation of Balwant or Balwant Rao, That, however, was

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not the name given to him by his parents. They called him Keshava; the other was the pet name, and somehow, that struck to him—perhaps because it was more appropriate.

Not much is known of his family except that they occupied an honoured position in the village of Chikkalgoan, Ratnagiri district. Tilak himself had traced his geneological tree to twelve generations; his grandfather, though born in comparative poverty, had amassed a fairly large fortune; but Tilak got very little of it; and what he got was finally transferred to the family temple.

Balwant was the eldest son of Gangadhar Pant, born* however, after three daughters; and received all the attention the family could give. The father put him to an English school quite early and Balwant justified the family's choice by a rapid rise. Even in those days, he revealed his peculiar temperament of striving for the most difficult. At the examinations, he would answer only the tough questions and pass over the easy ones! Two subjects, however received marked attention, Sanskrit and Mathematics, in both of which he won international laurels in later life.

## Mischievous Temperament

Passing the matric, he joined the Deccan College, Poona, where he soon made a mark. He took assiduously to physical culture and built up a robust constitution and improved upon it by taking to wrestling, boating and swimming. He could easily swim across the Ganges in Benares; and one of his favourite practices was to float his body in water for several hours without wetting the loaf of bread that he held in his hands. This physical prowess often took a violent turn. He would literally force people to take to open air exercise, break their medicine bottles, carrying such pranks to extreme limits.

And his spirit of independence often led him into trouble. The Sanskrit Professor for instance, insisted that his students should take notes of his learned lectures; and though they deserved that honour, Balwant stoutly declined to do so. But in spite of this perpetual clash, so great was the regard that the Professor had for the youthful rebel that he gave

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* Born on 23rd July 1856 an hour after sunrise at Ratnagiri.

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him the prize for a competition in Sanskrit verse, in which he competed against such a famous scholar as Mahadev Apte.

In spite of all these diversions, when the B.A. results were published, Balwant's name was found in the first class; but in the M.A. he failed to get even a pass. Instead of, however, persisting, he joined the Ll.B. class, and got the degree.

## First Public Triumph

It was at this juncture that he took the fateful decision to devote his life to public service through popular education; and in pursuance thereof, was started the New English School, the great institution which in five years developed into the Fergusson College. Many wise people looked upon his venture as positively foolish; and Mr. Tilak's own experience was also discouraging at the start. Only one other co-worker stood by him; the others kept aloof: still he fought on to splendid success.

This school enabled him to discharge his duty to the younger generation; what of others? For their education, the very next year, *i. e.* in 1881, he and his colleagues, Mr. Agarkar in particular, started the two weeklies, *Mahratta* and *Kesari*. Both of them made their mark almost at once; but their success had not a few tragic associations. They compelled Tilak to resign from the Fergusson College, whose managing body insisted that its members should devote their whole time to the educational work. And in the conduct of the two journals, Tilak came into repeated clash with the authorities.

The first of them occurred almost at once. Both the weeklies found it necessary to criticise severely the Kolhapur administration, first because of the popular view that the Prince, a halfwit, was treated badly as a lunatic; and secondly because of the complaints of mal-administration. And relying on certain published letters, Tilak took a very strong attitude—for which the Dewan started a prosecution. The letters were found not to be genuine and Tilak apologised. The administration persisted in the prosecution and he had to face his first period of inarceration, four months S. I.

Mr. Agarkar shared the impisonment with him and the days in jail seem to have been spent quite happily in making plans for the future. But poignantly enough, differences

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soon arose between the two colleagues on the issue of social reform, compelling Tilak to take upon himself the full responsibility for the two weeklies.

Neither the imprisonment nor the resignation of Mr. Agargar seems to have in the least moderated the vigour of Tilak's writings, and very soon, he found himself the central figure in another tough controversy, concerning the vagaries of one Mr. Crawford, a Revenue Commissioner, against whom the Government set up on inquiry for corruption. Tilak was warned by friends not to rush in as blood might ultimately prove to be thicker than water ; but he went ahead, urging on all people concerned, including the subordinate Mamlatdars of Mr. Crawford to produce before the committee all the evidence in their possession. To Mr Tilak's surprise, the inquiry report went against him. The sums Mr. Crawford had taken were held to be ' loans" : and though the Mamlatdars had been guaranteed protection, the Government dismissed a number of them Tilak was naturally furious ; and started a vigorous agitation. which brought him out, for the first time, as a public speaker.

Happily, the Government changed its view again and except a few, the others were reinstated ; and in recognition of the services rendered to them, they presented publicly to Mr. Tilak a scarf and a silver watch, which he carried with him to the last.

Never in affluent circumstances, Tilak found on resignation from the Fergusson College that he had to take to some activity that would secure him an income. He became a partner in a ginning factory started at a distant place ; and it proved to be a burden. Then he decided to make use of his own knowledge of law ; and that was successful. His private law classes soon became popular, yielding him about Rs. 150 a month.

## State and Social Reform

For the next few years, from 1882 to 1892, Tilak was mostly engaged in a hot controversy on social reform. His view point was that the Government should keep out of that sphere and the reforms should be secured by personal persuasion. In particular, he demanded that persons of spotless

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character should band themselves for such work and hasten it by personal example and even if it meant slow progress, he would not have State intervention.

This attitude naturally forced him to take very strong exception to the Age of Consent Bill of 1891 which sought to raise the age limit from ten to twelve. Mr. Tilak would have nothing of the kind and the *Kesari* became the chief mouthpiece of the orthodox.

It was a strange combination, because the Lokamanya personally was for drastic reform. He was against untouchability and for travel beyond the seas; and even advocated that if persons beyond the age of 40 wanted to marry, their choice should be restricted to widows—to none of which reforms the orthodox would agree. All the same, they chose him as their leader in the fight against the Age of Consent Bill; but even his advocacy failed to prevent its enactment.

## In the Legislative Council

With its passing, Mr. Tilak returned to politics and for the next few years, he was to be found at every important political gathering in Maharashtra. And so great was the hold that he thus got on the public mind that when he stood as a candidate to the Bombay Legislative Council, he had an easy victory, though his rival was a popular retired official with the backing of political moderates and social extremists.

The legislatures of those days met for only a few days in the year and the non-official members had little or no power. The utmost they could do was to invite attention to official misdeeds by interpellations and seek to influence policy by speeches, specially on the budget; and Mr. Tilak utilised all those opportunities so well that he had a walk over when he stood for re election. But this second term was very brief as he resigned it during his second prosecution in 1897.

## A Political Innovation

Before, however, proceeding to that episode, a reference may be made to a new plan of political work that he invented —the creation of political festivals.

Two of those deserve special mention, in honour of God Ganapathi and of Sri Sivaji. The Ganapathi Festival was, of

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course, being celebrated even before Tilak's time; but he gave it a new turn—a joint celebration with a view to create popular enthusiasm by reason of the common endeavour and superb magnificence. The festival in honour of Sri Sivaji was frankly political, aiming at rousing the consciousness of the Mahrattas but it had also a practical outcome in the Shivaji Memorial.

Enemies of India were not slow to realise the significance of these developments: and Sir Valentine Chirol was most outspoken in its condemnation; such opposition, however, only increased popular fervour and strengthened Tilak's hold on Maharashtra.

It was inevitable that so intense a political worker should come into clash with the authorities and for some months there were constant rumours about a prosecution; and it came when Mr. Rand, an officer entrusted with anti-plague operations at Poona, was murdered by some unknown person. There was nothing to connect with Tilak with it; but the Government took the view that the constant and bitter criticism of Mr. Tilak prepared the ground for such violence. The Advocate-General also refered to the Shivaji festival which he said, was given "a political colour and used as an instrument to rouse the public mind to a feeling of disaffection against the Government."

Mr. Justice Strachey, who presided over the sessions trial, in his summing up to the special jury, which was composed of a majority of non-Indians, went a step further and laid down the notorious dictum, later disowned by the Government itself, that want of affection meant disaffection. After a brief consultation the jury returned a verdict of guilt by 6 to 3 and the Judge awarded a sentence of 18 months' rigorous.

The case was taken in appeal even to the Privy Council where Mr. Asquith, later the Premier, appeared for Mr. Tilak; but the sentence was confirmed. Happily reports of ill-health under the severe prison rules of those days reached the highest authorities and under pressure from the Howard Association, better treatment was ordered. Finally, the intervention of persons like Max Muller led to the cancellation of six months of the sentence on the understanding that it was to be undergone if he was again convicted, for sedition; and he was released in September 1898.

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## A National Tour

He came home practically as a physical wreck and soon went to Singhad to recoup his health in the invigoating atmosphere associated with Sri Sivaji. He had naturally to keep out of all political activities ; yet, on pressing invitation he attended the Madras Congress in Christmas and from here he went on a long tour to the South. The grandeur of our temples made a strong appeal to him, as also the religious bent of the South Indians.

The tour included Burma, where his attitude on the question of Social Reform *vs.* Politics was further strengthened. He saw there that almost all the reforms advocated in India, including widow remarriage and divorce, were prevelant without political freedom or even consciousness. The inference, he urged, is obvious :

" There is no inherent connection or relation of cause and effect between social reform and earnestness about political regeneration. On the contrary, there is a possibility of opposition between them."

## The Partition Protest

At the conclusion of these tours, he resumed the editorship of the two papers and began to interest himself more and more in All India problems. The need for it was enhanced by Lord Curzon's autocracy culminating in the Partition of Bengal. It roused a national protest ; but there was wide divergence in Indian political circles as to how that protest was to be brought home. Some, led by Mr. Gokhale, were content with resolutions passed at public meetings and representation to British public opinion. The other, a small school to begin with, led by Tilak and Aravinda Ghose, insisted that the Nation shall proceed to action. Explaining this Policy to Mr. Nevinson, Mr. Tilak said :

" Our motto is Self-reliance, not Mendicancy.

" Besides the ordinary Swadeshi movement, we work by boycott and passive resistance.....

" Our object is to attract the attention of England to our wrongs by diverting trade and obstructing the Government."

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A split between the two schools of thought seemed inevitable at the Calcutta Congress in 1906, but it was avoided by the intervention of the G.O.M. Dadabhai Naoroji who as president, secured a compromise.

Four resolutions were passed, advocating Swaraj, Swadeshi, National Education, and Boycott—but this last one, only as a protest against the partition.

"These resolutions" said Sri Aurovinda Ghose, "were for Tilak the first step towards shaking the Congress out of its torpid tortoise-like gait and turning it into a living and active body."

## Split in Congress

But this triumph did not last long. The Moderates decided that these resolutions shall not permanently figure in the Congress programme; and that attempt wrecked the Surat session and brought about the tragic split, keeping out all the Non-Mendicants.

Of this misfortune, Mr. Aurobinda Ghose wrote:

"Many spoke of Mr. Tilak as the deliberate breaker of the Congress; but to no one was the catastrophe so great a blow as to him. He did not love the do-nothingness of that assembly; but he valued it both as a great national fact, and for its unrealised possibilities and hoped to make of it a central organisation for practical work. To destroy an existing and useful institution was alien to his way of seeing and would not have entered into his idea or wishes."

Scarcely had he got over the shock when he was arrested, once again for sedition, on the ground that his writings were calculated to foment violence—and that at a time when anarchism had just broken out in Bengal.

The indicted articles were in Marathi: all the same he was tried by a special jury consisting of seven Europeans and two Parsis, none of whom knew Marathi, on whose verdict by 7 to 2 of guilty, Justice Dawar sentenced him to six years with a fine of Rs. 1,000.

Mr. Tilak took the blow with calmness; and his declaration from the dock has since become classic:

"All that I wish to say is that in spite of the verdict of the jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher

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Powers that rule the destinies of things and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free."

The severity of the sentence created almost a convulsion in India. Riots broke out in Bombay and protests poured in from all quarters. In response to the same, the Government remitted the fine and ordered that the martyr shall be properly treated at Mandalay where he had been removed. The Government also permitted facilities for study and writing and the outcome of that wise decision was the *Gita Rahashya*.

## The Three Classics

Though Tilak lived as a politician and will be remembered mainly as such, he never made a secret of the fact that his inclination was different.

" I have had a real liking for following the occupation of a professor and writer; and it is by sheer force of circumstances that I wooed politics and have become an editor instead."

When the writer once asked him in 1919 what his position would be under swaraj, quick came the answer: " I shall go back as a professor."

One of his aversions, strange in an editor, was to write. Most of his articles were dictated; yet on three occasions, he sat down with determination to write; and thus produced the great classics, *Orion Arctic Home of The Aryans* and *Gita Rahashya*. The first two were published in 1893 and 1903 respectively, and though a long period separated them, they were really, twins; both relating to the antiquity of the Vedas.

Western scholars had come to the conclusion that the Vedas were not older than 2,000 B.C. which meant that they were not the most ancient of human records. Tilak was convinced that those estimates were wrong and his claim was as startling to them as simple.

In *Orion*, he utilises the astronomical data available in the Vedas to prove their antiquity, and he bases the conclusion on what is known as the Precession of the Equinoxes, the phenomenon associated with the crossing of the meridian by the sun. That point keeps on moving and at present is about 18 degrees east of Revati. The movement is known to be 50" per 25 years *i. e.*, one cycle is completed in 21,000 years.

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In several ancient works, there is reference to that equinoxial point. For instance when *Vedanga Jotisha* was written, it was 10 degrees to the west of Bharani which shows that it was written about 1300 B.C. In the Rig Veda, that point was in the constellation of *Orion* or Mrigashishra, from which it is obvious that the compilation took place about 4000 B.C. or 25,000 B. C. if in the earlier cycle.

Even if the former figure be accepted, the inference is obvious that Aryan civilisation preceded any other, the Egyptian or the Chaldean.

This view is further strengthened in his *Arctic Home of the Aryans*, where the evidence adduced is geological and not astronomical. Till that book was published, the prevailing view was that the Caspian region was the original home of the Aryans but Tilak showed that it was the Arctic region; and that is in keeping with the view now accepted by all scientists, that 8000 years ago, those areas were habitable and inhabited.

In respect of the *Gita Rahashya*, it is best to quote Tilak's own words :

" When I was quite a boy, I was often told that strictly religious and really philosophic life was incompatible with the humdrum life of every day. That set me thinking. And I sought an answer in the *Gita*. The conclusion that I have come to is that the *Gita* advocates the performance of action in this world even after the actor has achieved the highest union with the Supreme by Jnana or Bhakti.....I differ from all the commentators when I say that the Gita enjoins action even after Perfection.....I hold that serving the world and thus serving His Will is the surest way of Salvation and this way can be followed by remaining *in* the world and not going away from it."

## The Release And After

The Great War had just commenced when he was released in 1914 and one of his first declarations was that India should furnish every support to Britain in fighting for enemies. In so defining his policy, Mr. Tilak was greatly influenced by the idealistic talk of those days, specially the assurance that self-determination was to be the established policy of humanity. He was however soon disillusioned and

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in consequence, when Mrs. Besant started the Home Rule League, he started a sister organisation in Mahrashtra ; and the first achievement of the two Leagues was the healing of the split in the Congress at Lucknow in 1916.

So great was the reverence in which he was then held that his rising to speak on the Swaraj resolution was the signal for the most enthusiastic ovasion given by the Congress to any of its leaders. Perhaps it took Tilak himself by surprise. Anyway, he was so moved that his voice was choked. Thrice he tried to speak and every time he could not go beyond the words "I am not a fool", rather a mystifying opening. Then composing himself, he finished the sentence : "I am not a fool to think that this demonstration is in my honour. It is in honour of the ideals that I have striving for....." at which the ovation was renewed.

From that session to his death, he was the uncrowned king of the country ; and if Mrs. Besant seemed to be in greater popular favour, it was because the non-Nationalists preferred her to the Lokamanya. Nor did the latter grudge that honour to her. What he wanted was the rousing of the National consciousness ; and he was not the person to weaken that movement from personal considerations ; but when he found her definitely in Liberal ranks, he did not hesitate to put himself at the head of the movement that kept her out.

These years witnessed a number of official pinpricks. An attempt was made to bind him over ; but the High Court intervened. Then orders were passed under the Defence of India Act keeping him out of the Punjab and Delhi. Then again, when he set out on the Home Rule deputation to England, he was turned back from Colombo ; but after the Armistice, he was allowed to go as a representative of the Congress before the Montford reforms were given a final shape.

It was on this occasion that he launched the prosecution against Sir Valentine Chirol ; but the decision went against him, rudely shaking his faith in British Courts. He was also mulcted in heavy expense, to meet which a special fund had to be raised in India.

On his return, he resolved on starting a separate Democratic party in the Congress with a view to make the fullest possible use of the Reforms ; but before he could give a shape to it, death snatched him away on 31st July 1920—so that

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when the next evening people met in response to Gandhiji's appeal to observe it as a non-co-operation day, their first duty was to mourn the death of the veteran leader—a coincidence not without its own significance. It was as if that day heralded the end of one sway and the beginning of another.

The funeral was unprecedented in its grandeur. The Government gave special permission for cremation on the Chow pathi Sands and Lalaji who had just arrived after his long exile, delivered the funeral oration. And numerous were the memorials started. Poona has a Vidyalaya named after him and the Congress started the Tilak Swarajya Fund, the subscriptions to which reached a crore.

## His Enduring Greatness

Perhaps the best estimate of Tilak's greatness has been furnished by Sri Aurobinda Ghose. In the course of a masterly appreciation contributed to Ganesh and Co's edition of his speeches, he writes :

" Mr. Tilak is a man of various and no ordinary gifts, and in several lines of life, he might have achieved a prominent and eduring fame. Though he has never practised, he has a close knowledge of law and an acute legal mind, which had he cared in the least degree for wealth and worldly position, would have brought him to the front at the bar. He is a great Sanskrit scholar, a powerful writer and a strong, subtle and lucid thinker. He might have well filled a large place in the field of contemporary Asiatic scholarship. Even as it is, his *Orion* and his *Arctic Home* have acquired at once a world-wide recognition and left as strong a mark as can at all be imprinted on the ever-shifting sand of oriental research. His work on the Gita, no mere commentary, but an original criticism and presentation of ethical truth, is a monumental work, the first prose writing of the front rank in weight and importance in the Marathi language and likely to become a classic. This one book sufficiently proves that had he devoted his energies in this direction, he might easily have filled a large place in the history of Marathi literature and in the history of ethical thought. So subtle and comprehensive is its thinking, so great the perfection and satisfying force of its tyle. But it was psychologically impossible for Mr. Tilak to devote his energies in any great degree to another action than the one life

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mission for which the Master of his works had chosen him. His powerful literary gift has been given up to a journalistic work, ephemeral as even the best journalistic work must be, but consistently brilliant, vigorous, politically educative through decades to an extent seldom matched, and certainly never surpassed.

## Predestined to Lead

" The Congress movement was for a long time purely occidental in its mind, character and methods confined to the English educated few, founded on the political rights and interests of the people, read in the light of English history and European ideals, but with no roots either in the past of the country or in the inner spirit of the nation. Mr. Tilak was the first political leader to break through the routine of its somewhat academical methods, to bridge the gulf between the present and the past and to restore continuity to the political life of the nation. He developed a language and a spirit and he used methods which Indianised the movement and brought into it the masses. This divination of the mind and spirit of his people and its needs and this power to seize on the right way to call it forth proves strikingly the political genius of Mr. Tilak. They made him the one man predestined to lead them in the trying and difficult period when all had to be discovered and all had to be reconstructed.

"Mr. Tilak was in no sense what his enemies called him, a demagogue. He had not the loose suppleness, the oratorical fervour, the facile appeal to the passions which demagogy required. His speeches are too much made up of hard and straight thinking. He is too much a man of serious and practical action. But he was entirely a democratic politician, of a type not common among our leaders, one who could both awaken the spirit of the masses and respond to their spirit, able to lead them but also able to see where he must follow the lead of their predominant sense and will and feelings.

"It is equally a mistake to think of Mr. Tilak as by nature a revolutionary leader. That is not his nature or his political temperament. Mr. Tilak, though a strong willed man and a fighter by nature, he had this much of the ordinary Indian temperament, that with a large mind open to progressive ideas he united a conservative temperament strongly in touch

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with the sense of his people. In a free India he would probably have figured as an advanced liberal statesman eager for national progress and greatness, but as careful at every step as firm and decided in it and always seeking to carry the conservative instinct of the nation with him in every change.

## A Far Sighted Constitutionalist

" Such a man is no natural revolutionist, but a constitutionlist by temper though necessarily the leader of an advanced party or section. A clear constitution that he could use, amend and enlarge would have suited him much better than to break existing institutions and get a clear field for innovations, which is the natural delight of the revolutionary temperament.

" Mr. Tilak, of all men of pre eminent political genius, belongs to that great order of mind, which takes a mountain-top view of the whole and all the directions and keep that in their mental compass through all the deflections, retardations and tortuosities which the character of the intervening country may compel them to accept.

"He saw from the first that for a people circumstanced like ours there could be only one political question and one aim, not the gradual improvement of the present administration into something in the end fundamentally the opposite of itself but the early substitution of Indian and national for English and bureaucratic control in the affairs of India. A subject nation does not prepare itself by gradual process for liberty. It opens by liberty its way to rapid progress.

"The nation has already accepted the near fulfilment of his great aim as its own political aim, the one object of his endeavour, its immediate ideal. Whether that end—the end of a first stage of our new national life, the beginning of a greater India reborn for self-fulfilment and the service of humanity—come to-morrow or after a little delay, its accomplishment is now safe and Mr. Tilak's name stands already for history as a great nation-builder, one of the half dozen greatest political personalities, memorable figures, representative men of the nation in this most critical period of India's destinies, a name to be remembered gratefully so long as the country has pride in its past and hope for the future. "

Kesari Printing Works, Madras.